

Workforce Information Driving Regional Economies
June 19th and 20th, 2007
Facilitated Discussion: Nebraska

NOTES

I. Identify key learnings from the conference that relate to your state's workforce information and regional economies. (10 min)

Improving information dissemination: identify the peer groups for your target audience and have them participate in a focus group to identify the best delivery method for your materials. For example, paper format for specific peer groups is ineffective and a waste of money. Design websites with the intended audience in mind; by doing this effectively we create our own reality.

Identify competencies that are workforce needs; this is a key tool. Skill enhancement should be a focus. We need to talk about critical skills necessary for the economy. We currently focus on general skills, must get more specific. We need to come up with a better way to identify specific skills needed. A new system is needed.

Particularly striking was the lack of participation of education partners in elements of the discussion, and the references that "that group/those people [Education] need to "fix this." The integration/pipeline approach truly is a piece of the puzzle. It's incumbent/required that we integrate connections.

If we're designing a new system for a new audience, the new audience has to be a participant in the design process. For example: parents. In Nebraska, parents are very focused on degree attainment, and getting their kids to college rather than developing needed skills. In reality, college may or may not be the key to the American dream.

Wiki sites: how can they be utilized to facilitate business transfer? Many business transfers occur in the state; do we have a system set up for people to know what's available? We need someplace where there is a clearing-house of businesses for sale in Nebraska that would create easy access to business transfer/recruitment opportunities.

We've got to expend as much effort on recruiting talent as we do on job creation.

We must support the global expansion of our businesses, be receptive to international immigrants, and help them assimilate into the communities.

II. List new approaches, tools and enhancements to the current state workforce information systems that will better serve regional economies.

Education partners need to know what the workforce development system/One Stops are. Explore locating One Stops in schools. Even more important is that services be provided

to everyone who needs them. Is it important to create a brand that is about the integration of seamless services in the state, not branding by agency.

Citizens don't care who provides it, they want services, information, and community growth, now; a delivery mechanism that provides their needs.

One solution could be to identify a common theme related to Nebraska that all government sites use along with their specific agency name to reinforce a common brand.

Explore the use of an E-portal to provide access to/connect all the existing information.

Adults and young people in rural areas need more information on how to find a job. If the job doesn't currently exist in their local community, they often don't know how to find it or understand the transferability of their skills.

Explore the use of a DIG/delicious button: peer information on websites, user-generated news, virtual book-marking.

We must work through some key decision/access issues, and transcend our tendency to want to control information. One example of a related challenge is upper level management's opposition to an open blog on a government website.

Explore linking senior citizen centers for the over 60 crowd, nurturing a social networking place. Most people there are very mobile and well connected in rural communities. Explore providing them access to this information, virtually. Post local gossip on a website that would canvass counties for this information, customizing it for a local perspective. This could be an ideal place to communicate information on special projects employers need done; an entrepreneurial development incubator. This cohort tends not only be well connected but to have money. They might find an idea and run with it. Building on business transfer idea; if they have the information they can make connections at a personal level.

Furthermore, how do we take their information and then transfer it to the younger generation? Possible routes are networking sites or career centers. Take an inventory of job opportunities in rural Nebraska, go to a network that has rural Nebraskans in it (like Face Book) and post it on their marketplace. Anyone who has a connection with rural Nebraska is then flagged and then the information is disseminated.

Virtual social networking is key.

With respect to the collection and dissemination of LMI data, a problem is that by nature it is old and outdated. Thus, there are advantages to exploring the use of real-time surveys of business communities, through which to identify emerging opportunities/occupations, their related work activities, and needed skills. We need to tap into and utilize these types of information more.

Connecting wage information with alumni databases would be useful, however Universities have not gotten on board. Of particular importance is getting private schools to start cooperating. We need the ability to track people in other states- not just Nebraska- particularly since WRIS is now only available in 38 states, and since Carl Perkins performance not available through WRIS.

Once we track them, where do we point them for job opportunity? These records are most important for identifying trends. Beyond that, we could also partner with the Department of Revenue to learn about the jobs people are working in. There is an item for including this information on individual filer's tax forms, but either people don't enter the information when they complete the forms or Revenue doesn't use the information. Having access to this data would give you self-reported information, so there are no privacy issues. The DMV demographic data could also be useful, particularly if it is linked with the Department of Economic Development federal data. Alumni data found in the student clearinghouse, would also be helpful, it would just need to be matched to wage records, which we haven't been able to do.

Integration and connectivity of these data sources key, as is an understanding of their features and benefits if leveraged together, however, attitudes will need to adjust to do this. Everyone needs to be on board to share their own information in order to receive others'. There has to be leverage; it's not about comparing success or exploiting failure but creating the context to bring talent, drive economic development and create/enhance our regional economies.

III. Identify ways that key constituency groups can work better together to advance the use of workforce information to support regional economies within your state.

Besides FutureForce Nebraska, Department of Economic Development and Department of Education, bring Health and Human Services and Higher Education on board.

Improve the connectivity of the FutureForce membership. The membership isn't always the decision-makers. They have a surface connection and representation, but there is a need to foster a deep-level working relationship. There is a need to have both high level decision-makers and worker bees involved. The infancy of the relationship, by its very nature, has been at a high level. There's been inconsistency and in the players and growing pains within the overall organizational structure. A significant step is formalizing a foundation status and an executive board that has overall fiduciary responsibility & oversight. The four pillars, Career Connections, and partnership for innovation will provide the vehicle for this kind of work to become entrenched and bring the worker bees together. There is a need for a formalized institutional structure. In other words, take the existing relationships, formalize them, and grow them. This is necessary for policy visioning to take place and generate recommendations.

Consider how target audiences will come and participate in this conversation; we need their recommendations and evaluation of public policy as well (there is a council in Iowa that does this).

The business community needs to be included; the US and State Chamber of Commerce and Nebraska diplomats including a representation of CEO's and the total educational system from K-up to state colleges (4 year) and all of higher education.

The military could also bring significant technical skills. Involve veterans, and experts on veterans' issues. Also include young people, and create visible peer groups such as a congress there they have recommendation status and can issue advice on policy (Community Junior Chambers).

Also explore including the AARP, other non-profit organizations, and the Nebraska Children and Family Foundation - a non-government organization created to connect citizens with government services. They are a significant player, in that they are a phenomenal example of public/private partnership. We should connect their resources to this pipeline process.

Also incorporate the Department of Transportation, the Department of Revenue, Census, Tourism and the O/NPPD (Omaha/Nebraska public power district) which has community profiles for the towns they serve.

Include foundation systems, and endowments (the Buffet Foundation, Gates Foundation, and the Nebraska Community Foundation). Wealth transfer is huge, a small percent of it to endow these efforts would be significant.

The direction of the decision-makers is informed by worker bees, task forces, etc. These other pieces are in formulation, we have not yet indoctrinated them in a way that allows these results to occur.

Continuing down track of formalization of foundational 501c3 status of FutureForce and its key identified priorities is critical. Once accomplished, an additional inflow of resources will help accomplish data sharing, wage record/clearing house matching, capacity elements and all the other pieces.

IV. List steps to advance this session's recommendations within your state.

Governor and legislators are missing from FutureForce's work. It is important to capture legislators now that are prime to be educated on this, since many are new.

To do this, we need to create a common vision of Nebraska's viability, a different education/economic development/workforce skills paradigm.

Identify the common objective of all the players, draft it up then role it up the flagpole (so it becomes their idea). For each agency, we are asking what about their piece is indispensable, so we can tie it into the whole. From there, we indoctrinate it and engage the whole.

Another part of this is developing a common language, understanding, and a common message so that you communicate a uniform message. As an example LMI specialists communicate with business, so we need them to understand this at the front-line worker level, and to be able to communicate it in the same way.

We need to recruit businesses to the State that offer a living wage and self-sufficiency. The salary, however, isn't the only piece or necessarily the only thing. Explore the impact of the level of disposable income that the state's low cost of living can support. Consider a marketing effort: how far \$50,000 goes in New York vs. other communities in the U.S. Roll this out to the marketplace as a customizable calculator customizable.

A conversation about language must occur; mid-level staff need to take the vision back and communicate it up and down the chain of command, both ways.

V. Identify ways to enhance cross-state and/or multi-state workforce information collaboration, where advantageous to do so.

The quad-state approach could be a model. It is a potentially powerful tool initially about connecting workforce information and tools through a common connection point. It is a powerful next step in creating a model for a viable, effective regional economy. From the get-go, there must be commitment. In addition, industry partners say that if you build it, they will pay for it and help with ongoing sustainability. There's a benefit of delivering this information, and regionalizing.